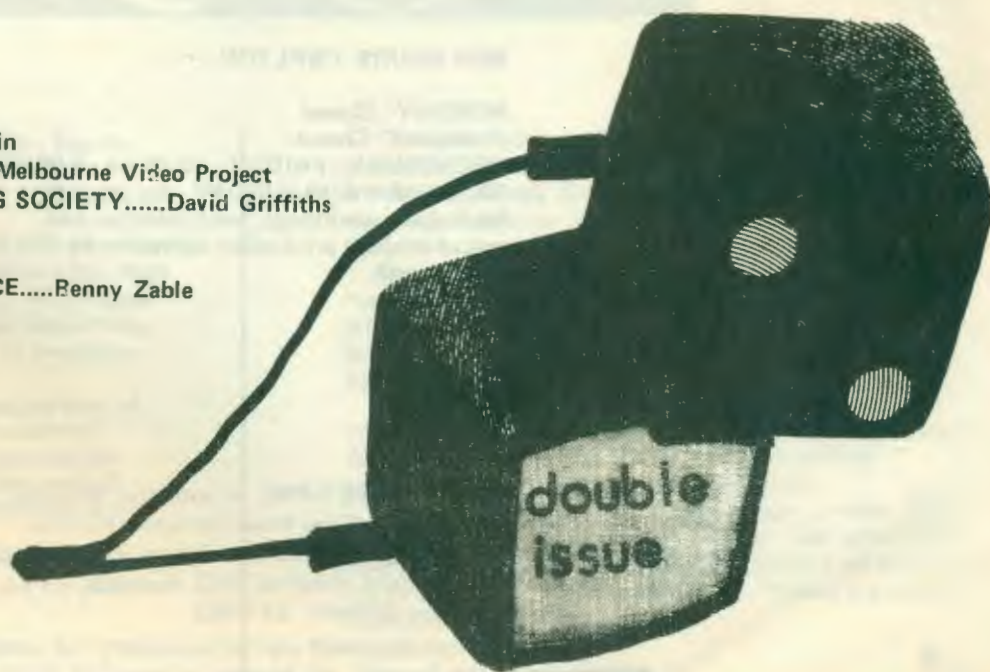


# ACCESS VIDEO NEWS



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**CHANGING MEDIA**

**& CHANGING**

**SOCIETY.**

**DAVID GRIFFITHS**

**ADDRESS TO**

**COMMUNICATIONS &**

**MEDIA SECTION,**

**SAANZ 76, AUGUST 1976**



# Domestication and Liberation

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Inevitably newspapers, radio and television stations reproduce the dominant ideology of a society. They also reproduce the contradictions and this explains why radical views, individuals and organisations are not entirely excluded from access to air time, editorial space and control of their own newspapers, programmes and radio stations.

The fact that radicals have some access and some control by no means provides the possibility for an eventual fundamental social change through a transformation of the media. Such a transformation is dependent on economic and political factors to which the media are subservient.

How, then, can changing media become a means for revolutionary social change?

In order to understand the sort of change to the media that would facilitate fundamental social change we need to understand what sort of political and economic change is desired and necessary and this, in turn, requires understanding the nature of the existing political and economic system.

A dominant characteristic of our society is exploitation and oppression of the many by the few. Ours is a capitalistic society in which a few benefit from their ownership over and control of the means of production and distribution. This capitalist class and its agents determine the allocation of economic, political and social rewards and punishments.

Revolutionary change, then, would aim to replace the individual ownership and control of this minority group by collective ownership and control of the means of production and distribution.

## Domestication and Liberation

Critical to understanding exploitation and oppression is obedience and acceptance. Why do we obey exploiters? Why do we accept oppressors? We internalise capitalism as normal and natural and it is necessary, therefore, to understand this internalisation process.

Learning is a process by which our past experience conditions our present behaviour and attitudes. In stating this, we need to separate the subtle and unstated assumptions implicit in structure and functions from the superficial and stated assumptions explicit in the content. While conscious of content, we are not necessarily conscious of structure and function.

This has cultural and historical consequences if we wish to examine the present situation of people and specifically their political consciousness. The present is very much a consequence of the past and institutional arrangements, standards of behaviour and habits and traditions are admittedly an evolving consequence of this past.

Our individual and collective perception of past, present and future is based on individual and collective knowledge and experience.

Primary perception is what we experience and know ourselves. Secondary perception is what we are told about experience and knowledge. The first is independent. The second is dependent. Increasingly we have become reliant on secondary sources and we are receivers of other people's perceptions. Dependence on secondary perception begins in the home where the infant and the child is encouraged to be dependent on the superior wisdom of his or her parents and other adults. Seldom are reasons given or reasoning provided but, instead, categorical decisions are made



and the very act of questioning those decisions is regarded as impertinent, offensive and subversive.

It is necessary then to look at the perceptual process as affects our knowledge of ourselves, of others and of our surroundings and how secondary perception domesticates us whereas primary perception liberates us. The hegemony of secondary perception is traceable to a cultural conditioning process - the composite result of an interplay between established institutions, patterns of decision-making, habits, traditions and mystiques. This is not to deny that there are elite groups who benefit variously from this hegemony but to assert that the specific group and specific individuals are to an extent accidental to this process and that this process is external to any conspiracies by specific groups and specific individuals.

It is an assumption of this paper that through a process of accumulated experience the working class of Australia has been domesticated into accepting the capitalist hegemony. The media, for instance, function to domesticate readers, listeners and viewers into accepting the inevitability of the status quo. It is further assumed that the internalisation of this experience of domestication into the cultural ethos has occurred and remains an unconscious restraint on the revolutionary potential of the working class.

This internalisation can be represented as a series of hidden beliefs based on learnt experience that exist as assumptions about normality. First, that the

State is opposed to the interests of workers and exists to protect the national and public interest which, in effect, means maintaining the status quo. Second, the Labour parties on attaining office act no differently than conservative political parties and in the end their policies are the same. Third, the trade unions develop their own iron law of oligarchy and develop a vested interest in their own preservation and attempt to manipulate and control their membership. Finally conservative and labour parties have used and will use the forces of the state to suppress the working class in the interests of the capitalist class.

Collectively the working class could transform the the economic and political system and the authoritarian apparatus of the state but workers are too intimidated and the very organisations supposed to represent the interests of workers in fact control and domesticate them. This has been the historic role of Labour Governments and trade unions.

Capitalism has become somewhat more sophisticated since the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Domestication succeeds and therefore suppression is Unnecessary. The significance of suppressions is that that it is used when domestication fails. Domestication is a process of conditioning by which individuals and institutions are conditioned to accept the normative values, expectations and beliefs of the state. Suppression occurs when the individual and institution temporarily free themselves of this conditioning albeit it accidentally or deliberately. Suppression of workers has occurred throughout Australian history. Separately these incidents are of differing significance but collectively they are a revealing insight into the true nature of our society and the forces that pre-dominate in that society.

How do we free ourselves from domestication and internalising capitalism as normal and natural?

We need to establish a new understanding of how our past has dictated the terms of the present and the extent to which our understanding of the past itself exercises a continuing influence on our society.

Liberation from this domestication can only come about through an understanding of our experiences in a capitalist system and from this understanding developing a revolutionary consciousness.

At present Australian history mystifies our perception of the present situation and tends therefore to domesticate our perception. If our received version of the media, for instance concerns its objectivity, factual based and value-free nature then the existing media be interpreted in similar terms. With an alternative definition





and explanation of our understanding of the media can be changed. The media need to be understood and analysed in terms of their past, present and future.

What has been the historic function of the mass media?

The historic function of the mass media has been to legitimise the economic and political system. This is inevitable when newspapers, radio and television stations are owned and controlled by capitalist interests or the State apparatus that serves capitalist interests.

To understand the role of the media we need to go beyond the content of the media for the content of the media is irrelevant to the structure and function of the media. The content of the media is a symptom of the repressive structure and ideological function of the media. We need to see the media as part of a cultural apparatus, including the public relations, advertising and cosmetics industries, which serves to protect and disguise the oppressive reality of the status quo.

There is no justification for believing that the media could fulfil an alternative function other than to support the maintenance of the status quo. The historic role of public broadcasting stations, ethnic stations and video access centres is no different from that of the ABC and commercial television and radio networks.

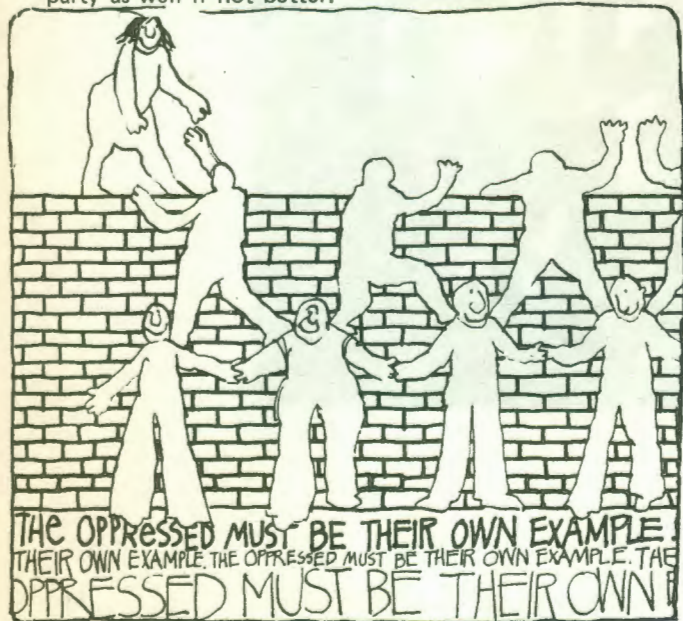
What, then, has been the significance of the establishment of a public broadcasting system, the ABC multi-lingual access station 3ZZ and the video access centres?

#### REFORM ONE: THE PUBLIC BROADCASTING SYSTEM.

Until 1974 Australia had a two tiered system of broadcasting - a national system and a commercial system. Since then, a third tier has been added - a public broadcasting system.

In establishing a public broadcasting system the Labour Government started a momentum that will be difficult to contain. As more groups receive public broadcasting licences it will be difficult to deny licences to other groups. Eventually there could be between 40 and 60 AM and FM radio stations in each capital city.

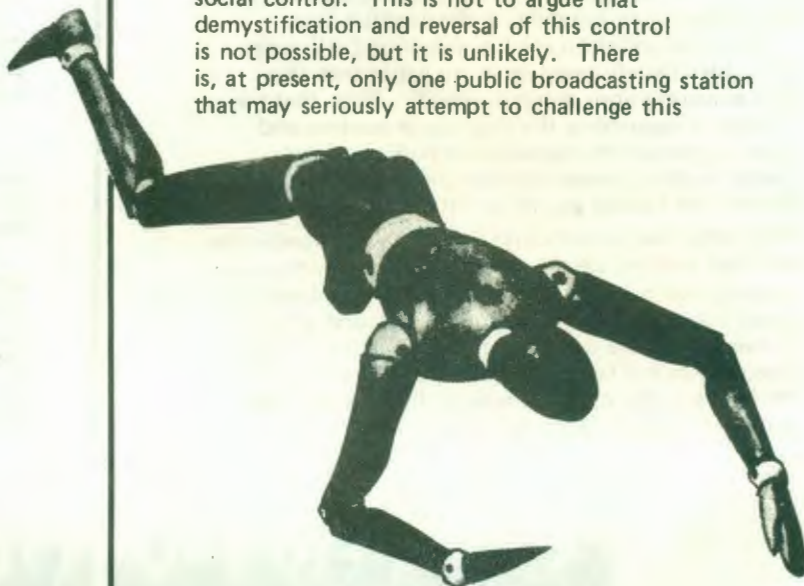
Because it was a Labour Government initiative, it could be assumed that the public broadcasting system is to the advantage of the Labour party. The irony is that a public broadcasting system would serve the interests of the Liberal-National Country party as well if not better.



Those people who argue for a pluralist system of broadcasting are really arguing for a fragmented system of broadcasting which will have the effect of isolating, dispersing and containing radical groups. But, then, a majority of those people who possess or desire public broadcasting licences are not radical, never have been and never will be and so it is necessary to acknowledge that it would be inappropriate to criticise these individuals and groups for not doing what they do not want to do. What you can do, however, is criticise the consequences of their beliefs, actions and power and assess these against an alternative ideological framework.

There are two broad ways of looking at public broadcasting and at public broadcasting stations. Firstly, they can be seen as ends in themselves offering alternative styles, choices, programmes and views within a pluralist system of broadcasting. Secondly, they can be seen as a means to an end - for example, as agents for revolutionary social change.

The significance of the public broadcasting system is that it represents an extension of social control. This is not to argue that demystification and reversal of this control is not possible, but it is unlikely. There is, at present, only one public broadcasting station that may seriously attempt to challenge this



control and that is the Community Radio Federationsstation 3CR in Melbourne.

The public broadcasting system is an alternative to the commercial and ABC networks and the essential characteristics of this alternative are:

Firstly, it is essentially self-funding with the stations raising their own funds and receiving limited government funds.

Secondly, the stations are austerity stations with minimal staff, limited resources and low budgets.

Thirdly, the stations are in most cases heavily dependent on volunteerism - lacking funds, staff and resources volunteers are expected to provide the labour, time and resources necessary.

Fourthly, the stations own and operate their own transmitters - like the commercial networks and unlike the ABC network.

Fifthly, most of the stations have been given licences without the need to publicly account for and justifying those licences and, at present, there is no established procedure for reviewing these licences.

Finally, most of the licences have been given to safe, respectable or ineffective middle class groups.



As public broadcasting is now established this becomes an argument for its continuation and extension. We are faced with the inevitability of momentum - the acceptance that an established innovation is established, will continue and will expand. Advocates of public broadcasting are attempting to persuade the Government and the community that the public broadcasting system is a natural outcome of a logical development in broadcasting. It is a search for legitimacy and credibility.

There is a myth that public broadcasting could be a catalyst in introducing and guaranteeing the freedom to broadcast - the assumption that the structure of the system should be such as to provide outlets for all possible tastes and interests without the need for detailed regulation and government control in entertainment and information. This is, in fact, a limited view of broadcasting for it ignores the ideological structural constraints that are equally shared by, imposed upon and reflected in public broadcasting, ABC and commercial networks.



## REFORM TWO: THE ABC AND 3ZZ

A year ago I wrote a critical monograph about the Australian Broadcasting Commission's involvement with the multi-lingual access radio station 3ZZ.

In essence my original view stated one year ago remains unchanged: The ABC is part of the problem of broadcasting and to involve it in the resolution of the problem is to build-in the ingredients of failure. Critical to this analysis is, of course, the concept of failure. Establishing that failure has occurred depends on the objectives for the station and the establishment of a procedure to evaluate the implementation of these objectives. For 3ZZ there have been no real objectives and no evaluation procedures. As a consequence, it is difficult to contend success or failure. This lack of direction and analysis is of course convenient for it enables the Management of the ABC and the staff of 3ZZ to claim success when no-one else is in a position to dispute that claim. By failure the, I mean to argue that the station has had the following harmful consequences:

- 1) The existence of the station enables the remaining ABC stations, Radio 1 and Radio 2, to deflect pressure for change. This is not necessarily a conscious procedure and can result as much from the initiative of a community group as it can from the ABC. A minority group seeking air time will approach 3ZZ instead of Radio 1 and Radio 2.
- 2) The establishment of 2JJ and 3ZZ perpetuates the bureaucratic monopoly of the ABC and services to justify and legitimise that monopoly. Beneficiaries of 2JJ and 3ZZ will be less prone to examine and criticise Radio 1 and Radio 2.
- 3) The establishment of 2JJ and 3ZZ has enabled the ABC to isolate, contain and co-opt the self-styled progressives within the organisation who believe they are part of a radical restructuring of broadcasting.
- 4) The community has been forced into supporting the ABC. Attached on 3ZZ have led community groups to defend the station directly and support the ABC indirectly. This is what occurred when the Labour party's second Minister for the Media, Moss Cass, suggested that 3ZZ could include programmes relayed from 2JJ and he was criticised by the ABC, the 3ZZ staff and community users.
- 5) People and community groups support what they have which is not necessarily what they believe in but might as well be for all practical purposes. Comments such as mine could be seen as undermining the future of 3ZZ and, in part they do, and in as much as they do then it is understandable that they would oppose such criticism not necessarily because they disagree but because they believe something is better than nothing.

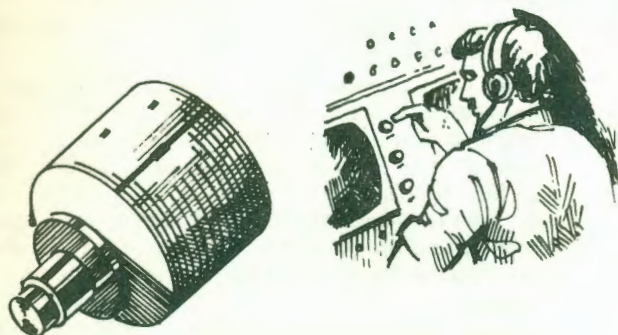




There have, of course, been achievements with 3ZZ and these include: The establishment of a different relationship between professional broadcasters and community groups, and the opportunity for any individual or group to gain access to air time -

These achievements are not inconsiderable and I would not want to suggest that they are not. What I would suggest, however, is that these achievements are trivial rather than substantial. They are trivial when you relate them to the ABC, when you relate them to the general nature and structure of the broadcasting and when you relate them to the general nature and structure of our society.

Something is perhaps better than nothing, but why not something else and something better. As a basic proposition I would argue that the individuals within an institution invariably function to legitimise and perpetuate that institution and that institutions invariably function to legitimise and perpetuate the system within which they exist. If the staff of 3ZZ choose to blame the ABC as an institution, the Commission, Head Office management or State Office management for their difficulties, disputes and turnmoils, then they overlook their own role in perpetuating the problem.



### REFORM THREE: THE ACCESS VIDEO CENTRES

In 1974 the Film, Radio and Television Board established 13 video access centres throughout Australia. Video has a seductive appeal because of its accessibility. But, access to video is access to a tool and not to determining the application of that tool.

Firstly, as with all media, video can be seen as an end in itself or a means to an end. The users of video differ in their perception and use of video and, as a consequence, their failure to agree on the use of video prevents video from effectively challenging the status quo.

Secondly, the major problem with video is that there are virtually no outlets for the use of video tapes other than public meetings, private discussion groups and in the individual's home. To argue, as some do, that this is the strength of video is to mistake and equate available outlets with ideal outlets.

Thirdly, even if public access channels were established you would have a similar problem to that of public broadcasting - legitimising existing television networks and diverting challenges and addressing segregated minority audiences.

Fourthly, video, as with public broadcasting stations, can become an end in itself. People who seek to use video as a means for social change can, in effect, divert themselves, their time and energy into operating and maintaining video to such an extent that they are prevented from working for social change.

Fifthly, video can be primarily aesthetic or political. Aesthetic video is non-threatening, acceptable while political video is threatening and unacceptable. Whether or not video is effectively and adequately funded depends on whether or not it is seen to be threatening or non-threatening.

Finally resources predetermine the use you can make of video - aesthetically and politically. Resources determine accessibility. A critical dilemma for the Melbourne Access Video and Media Co-operative, for instance, is that it requires \$172,000 per annum to be aesthetically and politically effective and will probably be forced to survive on \$52,000.

### CONCLUSION



There is no panacea for effective social change other than serious, demanding and long-term commitments to the development of a theory of social change. Without a theory there is no methodology and you are unable to meaningfully interpret and explain experiences and, as a consequence, effectively use that experience towards achieving revolutionary change.

Only conservatives committed to no action for their sakes and pragmatists committed to action for its own sake, irrespective of its relevance and meaning, would conclude that I am advocating a withdrawal from political involvement and action. Verbalism is an inadequate antidote to activism. What we need is praxis - action based on theory and theory based on action.

Under the Whitlam Labour Government there was verbalism and activism but what was said and what was done were quite distinct and separate.

There are some within the Labour Party who variously ascribe to a counter culture myth that society will change despite itself through the transformation and capturing of people's minds. With changed people there will be a changed society. Changed society there will be but not necessarily a less oppressive society just more sophisticated aided and abetted by those who think they are free when they are not free. The experience of the Labour Government should be enough to remind the counter culturalists that you can think what you like and even do what you like provided you do not threaten the economic and political system.

The real significance of 3CR, for instance, will be the ability of those associated with the station to accurately interpret the inability of the station to make a significant impact - its inability to significantly affect the hegemony of the ABC and commercial networks. This failure of 3CR should have the same impact as the similar failures of alternative theatre, alternative films, video access



centres and public broadcasting - the common inability of radical and alternative models to substantially change the capitalist system as models within the capitalist system.

A system of public communications is the product of the political and economic system. To talk of democratising newspapers, radio and television stations within a capitalist system is an illusion. There can be no revolutionary change within a capitalist system. There can only be reforms that can either help or hinder revolutionary change. The democratisation of the media will have to wait until the abolition of the capitalist system.

CHANGING MEDIA AND SOCIAL CHANGE was presented at SAANZ 76 on 21st August, 1976. In the ensuing discussion on the paper, question concerned whether or not I was advocating no action and no involvement and what was the alternative choice of action and involvement. What follows is a retrospective reflection and rewriting of my replies:



I am not advocating no action and no involvement but rather reflective action and involvement. My criticism of 3ZZ, 3CR, 2JJ and video access centres is with the failure of the people involved in these alternatives to reflect on and relate their involvement with the role of the media in society, the relationship of their particular experience with social change and the relationship between their objectives and achievements. People should be involved but they should reflect on their involvement. Critical issues are:

- The meaning of words and slogans such as 'access', 'community' and 'alternative'.
- The need to relate the short term and long term objectives of 'democratising media'. What transitional short term objectives are consistent with long term objectives.
- The need to analyse the nature and effect of power, and distinguish between a transfer of power and a transformation of power.
- The role of professionals and professional ideologies irrespective of political beliefs.
- The relationship between ends and means with an emphasis on processes instead of ends which could otherwise legitimise undermining and inherently incompatible processes.

A questioner queried my statement that public broadcasting stations were receiving limited funds from Government. In reply, I said that this referred to the relationship between the limited funds provided and the substantial funds needed rather than the actual funds provided. The same questioner queried my statement that the effect of 3ZZ and 2JJ would be to divert pressure for changing Radio 1 and Radio 2 and requested evidence of this diversion. In reply, I said I had no evidence but was commenting on an inevitable long term tendency and consequence. We need to differentiate between change initiated by the ABC and change forced on the ABC.

Textual footnote: For the SAANZ presentation, wherever the terms 'political and economic system' appear I have added the word cultural i.e., 'cultural, economic and political system'.



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